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HEALTH DEPARTMENT STAFF MEET WITH MARTIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE REPRESENTATIVES TO DISCUSS HEPATITIS A PREVENTION AND OUTREACH PLANS

Outreach teams to focus hepatitis A vaccination and community education

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Martin County, FL – On July 18, staff from the Florida Department of Health in Martin County and members of the Martin County Sheriff's Community Policing Unit, led by Sergeant George Yacobellis, met to discuss plans to work in collaboration to provide hepatitis A education and encourage vaccination throughout the community.

"The Sheriff's office is a key and valued partner in supporting our hepatitis A response and prevention efforts," said Carolann Vitani, Interim Health Officer and Nursing Director for the Florida Department of Health in Martin County. "We are grateful for the support of the officers and their willingness to facilitate opportunities to raise awareness about the importance of hepatitis A vaccination in our community."

During the meeting, health department staff provided officers with an overview about hepatitis A symptoms, how the virus is transmitted and how an epidemiological investigation is conducted. Officers also learned about how health department staff work in partnership with local and state agencies to support hepatitis A prevention initiatives. Officers were also provided with hepatitis A prevention cards, which direct residents to resources for the hepatitis A vaccination.

Collaboration with the Sheriff's office began in May when health department staff began vaccinating inmates at the Martin County Jail. Through weekly outreach to the jail, more than 400 inmates have received the hepatitis A vaccine. The Martin County Sheriff's office has also agreed to assist with any needs that the Department of Health in Martin County may have, both for vaccination outreach and investigation resources as needed.

In the coming weeks, the groups will join forces at key community events and gatherings such as soup kitchens to provide hepatitis A vaccination and education.

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. The virus is found in the stool of people who are infected and is commonly spread through person to person contact. Infection occurs when someone ingests the virus. While normally not fatal, persons with chronic disease, compromised immune systems and the elderly are more likely to experience a severe illness, leading to liver failure and possible death. Martin County has 32 confirmed cases of hepatitis A and 4 deaths associated with complications from the virus.

Practicing good hand hygiene plays an important role in preventing the spread of hepatitis A. Alcohol based hand sanitizers do not kill the virus. Washing hands with soap and water after changing diapers, and before preparing, serving or eating food is key to stopping the spread of hepatitis A and other germs.

Inform, Educate & Vaccinate

Health Department staff are working closely with community partners including, the House of Hope, LAHIA, Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) Clinic, the Salvation Army and others to provide the hepatitis A prevention education and vaccine to vulnerable and at-risk populations throughout the county.

Since April, there have been approximately 10,085 doses of the hepatitis A vaccine dispensed in Martin County, with Health Department staff providing about 2,594 of those doses.

The hepatitis A vaccine is available in the community via healthcare providers and local pharmacies. The Florida Department of Health in Martin County at 3441 SE Willoughby Blvd., Stuart offers free hepatitis A vaccinations for uninsured, underinsured and at-risk adults (ages 19 and older) on a walk-in basis, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 3:30 pm.

Additional Resources:

The Florida Department of Health has launched an information line, email box and a website to address general questions about Hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A, Information Line:

1-844-CALL-DOH (1-844-225-5364) available Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Website: www.Floridahealth.gov/hepa

Email questions: HepA@flhealth.gov

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